# Fear's Two Faces

Lionel Hartley

# Fear's Two Faces

**Lionel Hartley**

Fear’s Two Faces
Lionel Hartley
Edited by volunteers and adapted from audio recordings of a few of Lionel Hartley’s public presentations.
Copyright ©2007 Lionel Hartley
All rights reserved in all countries.
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.
Typeset in Times
Illustrated with original drawings by Lionel Hartley
Typesetting by volunteers using a book template provided and designed by the author.

# Contents

Introduction ..... 5

Part 1: Fearlessly Facing Fear

Fearlessness ..... 7

Suspicion ..... 11

Scepticism ..... 18

Selfishness ..... 19

Stubbornness ..... 20

Suppression and Silence ..... 21

Shortsightedness ..... 22

The Cure for Fear ..... 24

(Continued...)

Our Red Seas ..... 36

Part 2: Fearing God

Preamble ..... 39

Semantics ..... 40

Afraid of God? ..... 49

Reverential Fear ..... 54

Benefits of Fear ..... 60

# Introduction

Mythology has many two-faced gods: Janus (Roman mythology – we get our month ‘January’ named after him), Duir or Thor (Nordic mythology – we get our weekday ‘Thursday’ named after him), Hercules (Greek mythology), Llyr or Lear (Anglo-Saxon mythology).

Fear is also two-faced. Although these god’s two faces symbolize their ability to look both into the past and the future, representing beginnings and endings, transitions, and the passage of time, the two faces of fear are more to do with semantics. The same word fear is used to talk of being afraid and demonstrating reverence.

In Part One of this volume we will look one face of fear: fear as defined by being afraid.

In Part Two we look at the other face, the biblical command to fear God – both reverencing Him and being afraid to hurt the One we love.

Illustration by Lionel Hartley

# Part 1: Fearlessly Facing Fear

## Fearlessness

Needy miners and settlers in British Columbia, while engaged in stripping abandoned Fort Alcan of timber, electrical appliances, and plumbing, made an amazing discovery.

While dismantling the jail they found that mighty locks were attached to heavy doors, and 50-millimetre (2 inch) steel bars covered the windows, but the walls of the prison were only flimsy wallboard of plaster and paper, painted to resemble iron.

A good old heave against the walls by a man of average build would have burst the wall out. Nobody ever tried it because nobody thought it possible.

Brendan Francis wrote, “Many of our fears are tissue-paper thin, and a single courageous step would carry us clear through them.”

Many of us are prisoners of fears that are nothing when pushed against. Satan cannot do anything against a child of God, but he loves to put barriers of papier-mâché in the path of a believer.

This is to make him think that there is no progress in the direction of the will of God. When by faith we push against fear we will be free.

How fearless do you feel right now? Today God brings to each of us a choice – we can live by fear or by faith.

If we choose fear we will live our entire lives never fully experiencing the great satisfaction of taking a risk for God.

If we choose to walk in faith we will experience a freedom that will lead to a personal assurance that we are living life to the full.

Although fear is a formula for failure, some of

us here today are still living by fear even though we want to live by faith.

Harry Houdini, the famed escape artist from a few years back, issued a challenge wherever he went. He could be locked in any jail cell in the country, he claimed, and set himself free in short order. Always he kept his promise, but one time something went wrong. Houdini entered the jail in his street clothes; the heavy, metal doors clanged shut behind him.

He took from his belt a concealed piece of metal, strong and flexible. He set to work immediately, but something seemed to be unusual about this lock.

For thirty minutes he worked and got nowhere. An hour passed, and still he had not opened the door. By now he was bathed in sweat and panting in exasperation, but he still could not pick the lock.

Finally, after labouring for two hours, Harry Houdini collapsed in frustration and failure against the door he could not unlock. But when he fell against the door, it swung open!

It had never been locked at all! But in his mind it was locked, and that was all it took to keep him from opening the door and walking out of the jail cell.

I would like to suggest that fear can be fought with the firearm of faith.

But before I share with you some steps on how to fight fear with faith, we will see some of the problems with fear.

# Suspicion

**Firstly, fear makes us suspicious.**

I am sure you have heard of or even see the mighty Niagara Falls on the border between New York State and Ontario, Canada.

The historian Edgar D. Smith tells us that on the night of March 29, 1848, Niagara Falls stopped completely – unheralded, unassisted and unbelievably.

As the rapids dwindled and the falls disappeared, silence flooded the surrounding countryside so overwhelmingly that it wakened sleeping people and brought them to their doors, frightened by a phenomenon they couldn't identify.

As the realization came that the falls had stopped, they snatched up clothing and ran to the river. There, the flare of torches showed stretches of mud

and boulders gleaming nakedly between scattered pools of black water.

By the next afternoon spectators lined the riverbanks, exploring the exposed riverbed and turning up ancient tomahawks and other implements of Indian warfare.

For the first time in history, a detachment cavalry rode the riverbed, and people walked dry-shod from shore to shore.

While the matter-of-fact observers looked for a scientific explanation for the phenomenon, the superstitious observers regarded it as an ominous omen.

Nightfall found most of the churches jammed with people praying or talking in frightened voices about the end of the world.

Fear began to assume the proportions of panic. And then, from up the riverbed came a low growling noise, spreading out and reaching forward until the earth and air seemed to tremble and vibrate.

In an unbroken wall of water, the torrent of Niagara surged forward to crash over the brink of the falls.

Again the familiar roar filled the air, and faces that had been white and strained softened, and fingers clenched in fear relaxed. The explanation for the awful silence came later.

During the day of March 29 a heavy wind had started the Lake Erie ice field in motion and tons of ice jammed at the river's entrance near the region of Buffalo, damming up the river for almost 30 hours until the ice shifted and the dam broke up.

The book of Exodus tells us about the Israelite people leaving the bondage of Egypt for the freedom God had planned for them.

They have just seen God's mighty handiwork. They have witnessed the ten plagues; they have experienced the first Passover; Pharaoh has just released them after 400 years of bondage.

You would think that they will be filled with faith, but instead they are crippled by fear.

Exodus 14:1-16 reads, *"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,*

*2) Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.*

*3) For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.*

*4) And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so.*

*5) And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?*

*6) And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him:*

*7) And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them.*

*8) And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.*

*9) But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.*

*10) And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord.*

*11) And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?*

*12) Is not this the word that we did tell thee in*

*Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*

*13) And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.*

*14) The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.*

*15) And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:*

*16) But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."*

Moses was leading the people away from Egypt and to get away from Pharaoh's army they would have to cross the Red Sea – that's where we're going to pick up the story.

We're going to let the Israelites stand as an example to show us what fear can do to us if we let it replace faith in our lives.

Continuing with Exodus 14, reading from verse 11, *"And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?"*

# Scepticism

**Yes, fear makes us suspicious.**
**Secondly, fear makes us sceptical.**

When we are afraid, we begin to doubt. We doubt ourselves, we doubt God, we doubt other people.

We become sceptical. Studies have shown that cynical people basically have a problem with fear. We often ridicule what we're afraid of.

Verse 12 says, Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

# Selfishness

**Thirdly, fear makes us selfish.**

If I am afraid, the only thing I can think of is myself. I don't think about you, I don't think about God, I don't think about anybody else, I just focus on me.

Let's look at the rest of verse 11: Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves in Egypt? Why did you make us leave?

They are saying "Look what you've done to us." When we're afraid, we accuse others, we excuse ourselves, we pass the buck, we blame other people and we run from responsibility.

# Stubbornness

**So fear makes us selfish, suspicious, and sceptical. Fear also makes us stubborn. We resist change when we're afraid.**

In verse 12 we read that they said, "Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt?"

In other words, they were saying to Moses, "Don't rock the boat. Don't upset the status quo. We've always done it this way before."

Stubborn fear keeps people from growing, it keeps businesses from growing and it keeps churches from growing. God is ready to set the Israelites free from 400 years of slavery and they say, "Leave us alone!"

# Suppression and Silence

**Fifthly, fear makes for suppression and silence.**

During his years as premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev denounced many of the policies and atrocities of Joseph Stalin.

Once, as he censured Stalin in a public meeting, Khrushchev was interrupted by a shout from a heckler in the audience. “You were one of Stalin’s colleagues. Why didn’t you stop him?”

“Who said that?” roared Khrushchev. An agonizing silence followed as nobody in the room dared move a muscle. Then Khrushchev replied quietly, “Now you know why.”

Fear has a way of paralysing us.

# Shortsightedness

**Sixthly, fear makes us shortsighted.**

A German Proverb says, *"Angst macht den Wolf größer als er ist"* ("Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is").

When the Israelites were confronted with the Red Sea, they said that their Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out there in the wilderness.

They wanted to go back to the "good old days" in Egypt. They wanted to return, they wanted to retreat, they wanted to revisit.

They had so little faith that God would come through for them and grant them freedom that they preferred to return to bondage in Egypt.

And you know what? Many of us today are living the exact same way. We would rather live in

the bondage of our own sin, rebellion, and guilt, than be set free by risking it all for Jesus Christ.

It's not that we would really prefer living in bondage, we are just so afraid to let go and let God, that we really don't know what else to do.

A five-year-old was scared, in bed, while thunder loudly rolled. "Don't be afraid, God's with you dear", by mother she was told. "I know all that," the child replied, "but mother, I'd be glad, if you will stay up here with God, and I'll go down to dad."

# The Cure for Fear

James S. Hewett tells us that a young soldier who was fighting in Italy during World War II jumped into a foxhole just ahead of some bullets.

He immediately tried to deepen the hole for more protection and was frantically scraping away the dirt with his hands. He unearthed something metal and brought up a silver crucifix, left by a former resident of the foxhole.

A moment later another leaping figure landed beside him as the shells screamed overhead. When the soldier got a chance to look, he saw that his new companion was an army chaplain.

Holding out the crucifix, the soldier gasped, “Am I glad to see you! How do you work this thing?”

Norman Vincent Peale wrote that, “The cure

for fear is faith". Perhaps some of us have been living in fear for so long that we really don't know what it means to live by faith.

Well, let's see what we can do to rectify that by learning how to replace fear with faith.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, who was once the minister of Riverside Church in New York City, had an occasion to speak to his congregation about cynicism, fear, and faith.

He said, "It is cynicism and fear that freeze life; it is faith that thaws it out, releases it, sets it free."

On another occasion he wrote, "Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyses, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals; fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable—and, most of all, fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, while faith rejoices in its God."

How can we replace fear with faith? How do we take risks in faith rather than caving in to fear?

Whether we're talking about that first step of

faith of becoming a Christian, or perhaps you're already a believer ready to step out in another area of faith, we all need to learn how to move on to the next level.

If I am anxious it is because I am living in the future. If I am depressed it is because I am living in the past. If I'm going to take risks, God wants me to get the facts.

Anything that requires faith is going to have some element of risk in it, but God says, "There's a right way and there's a wrong way." God doesn't want you taking foolish risks, that's not faith.

So He says, "First off, get the facts. Find out all you can first." (Proverbs 13:16 Says, *"Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly"*. The NIV says, *"Every prudent man acts out of knowledge..."*

Proverbs 23:23 says, *"Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding."*

Another translation renders it, *"Get the facts*

*at any price, and hold on tightly to all the good sense you can get".*

Several years ago there was a well-known American television circus show that developed a Bengal tiger act. Like the rest of the show, it was done "live" before a large audience.

One evening, the tiger trainer went into the cage with several tigers to do a routine performance. The door was locked behind him.

The spotlights highlighted the cage, the television cameras moved in close, and the audience watched in suspense as the trainer skilfully put the tigers through their paces.

In the middle of the performance, the worst possible fate befell the act: the lights went out! For twenty or thirty long, dark seconds the trainer was locked in with the tigers.

In the darkness they could see him, but he could not see them.

A whip and a small kitchen chair seemed

meagre protection under the circumstances, but he survived, and when the lights came on, he calmly finished the performance.

In an interview afterward, he was asked how he felt knowing that the tigers could see him but that he could not see them. He first admitted the chilling fear of the situation, but pointed out that the tigers did not know that he could not see them.

He said, “I just kept cracking my whip and talking to them until the lights came on. And they never knew the facts – and that is that I could not see them as well as they could see me.”

Once we’ve got the facts, we need to count the cost by finding out why we’re doing what we’re doing and what the risk is involved in it.

What it’s going to cost in time. What it’s going to cost in money. What it’s going to cost in reputation and emotional energy.

Once Jesus was talking to a crowd and He was telling them that if they were going to become one of His followers they needed to count the cost before

they took that step of faith. He illustrated His point with the following words from Luke 14:28 and 31:

*"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?…*

*Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?*

He is telling us that if we're going to build a building, we had better go out and plan a budget first – and evaluate the cost. If we're going to go to war, we'd better figure out what the strength of our army is, compared to the strength of the enemy's.

If we're going to step out in faith and believe in Jesus Christ for our deliverance from bondage, we need to evaluate, count the cost and, analyse the risk.

It is not a lack of faith to evaluate; it is an encouragement to faith, as Proverbs 20:25 says, *"It is foolish and rash to make a promise to the Lord before counting the cost."*

Every decision has a price tag and you'd better know what the price is before you take the risk.

The next stage in moving from fear to faith is found in Proverbs 14:15 which says that the prudent person carefully consider his or her steps.

The sensible person of faith thinks about where they're going. This person understands that you don't go charging into battle without a plan.

Now, you might be wondering what this has to do with faith, with taking risks. Consider Proverbs 16:9, "We should make plans… counting on God to direct us".

There are two parts to this verse: man's part and God's part. We should make our plans (that's our part). And counting on God to direct us (that's God's part). They both go together.

As you plan, you pray and you ask God to direct you because prayer and preparation go together.

And finally, we let go and launch out in faith.

Pat Schroeder wrote, “You can’t wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time.”

We’ve got to let go and launch out if we’re going to be a person of faith. You’ve heard the saying, “Turtles only make progress when they stick their necks out.” Well, it’s true about human beings, too.

George Bernard Shaw wrote, “People become attached to their burdens sometimes more than the burdens are attached to them”.

Many years ago I spent several months travelling with the Moscow Circus in New Zealand.

I had many occasions to observe the circus trapeze artists. The Trapeze artist is a hundred feet high in the air and he swings out on one bar while another bar is coming from the other direction for him to grab. But the swinging bars are spaced apart so that the artist has to let go of one bar before he can grab onto the next one, and kind-of leap for it.

And when he leaps for it, there is a point in the trapeze act, that that person is suspended, a hundred feet above the ground, holding on to thin air for a

split second. For the moment that he let go of this one, and before he actually was able to grab the other one, he's sailing there, a hundred feet above the ground, holding onto nothing.

It becomes entertainment because the audience sees it as scary.

Let's use that as a mental image of what it means to live by faith. God wants to work in our life, but we have to let go of the past before we can grab hold of the future.

We've got to let go of security in order to grab opportunity.

This is very important, because the most difficult part of leaping to the new life is the letting go of the old life.

We want to hold on to the old job, until the new job is secure. We want to make sure that everything's set up in our new home, before we move out of the old home.

A bachelor needs to let go of the independence

of being single in order to grab on to the intimate joy of being married.

In most decisions, there is a Rubicon, a point of no return, where we have to face our fear.

That's where the children of Israel were at the Red Sea. God had backed them into a corner.

There were mountains on either side, there's a sea in front of them, and the Egyptians were hot in pursuit.

They had an opportunity to believe, to have faith, but instead, they responded in fear.

And they became selfish, suspicious, sceptical, stubborn, silenced and short-sighted. "Why don't we go back to Egypt? The good old days."

I ask you, what were the "good old days"? They had four hundred years in slavery, they've been beaten, they've been mistreated, they've been abused, they've been killed, they've been starved, they had no rights, they've been overworked for four centuries and now they're saying, "Let's go back We know it

was bad, but at least we knew what was happening there, and we don't know what's going to happen here. So let's just go back."

Why do you and I stay in destructive situations? Why do we not step forward in faith? Why do we hold back when God says to launch out?

It's for the same reason the Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt.

The point is, we are afraid of freedom. Now, what is the solution to that? How do you get the courage to let go and launch out and face your fears?

The answer to this is found in Psalms 56:3-4, *"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me"*.

Notice that this moves from "when I am afraid" to "I will not be afraid". The Psalmist admits that he is afraid, but when he puts his trust in God, the fear subsides.

Courage is not the absence of fear – courage is

moving ahead in spite of your fear.

When we come to the moment of truth, we not only have to let go, and we not only have to launch out, we also have to look up.

Three hundred and sixty-five times we will find the expression “fear not” in the Bible; that’s one for each day of the year.

# Our Red Seas

When the Israelites were at the Red Sea, God didn't take them around the Red Sea.

He didn't build a bridge over the Red Sea. He didn't command the building of an ark. He didn't provide a raft, a boat or a ferry. He took them through the Red Sea.

And it wasn't until they stepped into the water that it started happening.

What is your personal Red Sea? What is it that scares you to death? What is it that frightens you? What is it that's got you worried? What is it that seems an impossible barrier? What is it that looks unpredictable? What is it that seems overwhelming? That's your Red Sea.

Do you know the story of the Cherokee Indian

youth's rite of passage? His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone.

He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it.

He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a man. He cannot tell the other boys of his experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own.

The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kind of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him.

Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind blows the grass and earth, and shakes the stump, but he sits stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man.

Finally, after a horrific night, the sun appears and he removes his blindfold. It was then that he discovers his father sitting on the stump next to him. Father had been at watch the entire night, protecting

his son from harm.

Closing part 1 with Father God's words of Isaiah 41:10, *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* Amen.

# Part 2: Fearing God

## Preamble

The writer of the book of Hebrews states "It is a fearful (dreadful) thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Rev Dr E G Gibson's commentary adds, "But it is marvellous to put yourself there. You discover that you are in the hands of Absolute Love".

# Semantics

Sometimes we may be bothered by Bible passages that we don't understand and the concept of fearing a loving God is one of concern for many Christians.

Perhaps if we are going to be bothered, maybe it is because God's Spirit is convicting us through the Bible passages that we do understand.

Revelation 14:7 reads, *"Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters"*.

Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "There is a right fear of God and we neglect and ignore that at our peril".

In our English language we have many words that have contradictory meanings and this can be

troubling for many people.

For example in the hymn ‘We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought’, the author, Thomas B Pollock uses the line, “... bowed beneath Thine awful eye”.

The word “awful ‘ in this line does not mean dreadful, terrible, appalling, dire, or unpleasant, but he is using the original definition of awful — meaning full of awe. Just as the word ‘awesome’ means some or a little awe, ‘awful’ means, in this context, a massive amount of awe.

Another example is the word ‘cleave’. To cleave can mean to bond firmly together or it can mean to tear apart without separating or it can even mean to cut apart completely.

In the first two uses of the word in the King James Bible they have quite opposite meanings.

In Genesis 2:24 it says, *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* The Hebrew word here for cleave is *daw-bak* meaning to cling to.

Same as in Deuteronomy 4:4 where is says that those who chose to *"cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day."*

The second reference to 'cleave' is Leviticus chapter one where it talks of the sacrificial offering of turtledoves or young pigeons. Verse 17 says, *"And he shall cleave it with the w*ings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder." The Hebrew word here is *shaw-sah'* meaning to split or tear but not completely separate.

And in the psalm found in Habakkuk 3:9 it says *"Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers."* Here the Hebrew word is *baw-kah'* meaning to completely cut or divide in two. All references using the English word 'cleave'.

Deuteronomy 10:20 also uses the word 'cleave' but adds another couple of English words that cause confusion. It says, *"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name."*

The word 'swear' in this verse is not referring to the use of expletives, profanities, swearwords or

vulgar language, but making an oath. It is based on the Hebrew word for seven and literally means to repeat a declaration seven times, a symbol of completeness or perfection.

The other troublesome word in Deuteronomy 10:20 is the word 'fear' in the phrase *"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God"*.

There are two extremes in interpreting this that are both contrary to the Written Word.

One is a watering-down of the word to simply meaning having a healthy respect for God and the other is being afraid of Him and of judgement. Again, I say, these are extremes.

When I think of interpreting the fear of God as being afraid of Him, I am reminded of a quote from C.S. Lewis's book 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', where Mr. Beaver describes the might and majesty of Aslan, the lion (representing God).

When he finishes, Lucy asks, "Is—is he safe?" Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the

King I tell you."

So here I confess that I must disagree with many of my fellow Bible scholars in interpreting what the fear of God means, so please bear with me as we allow Scripture to speak for itself.

We earlier looked at Revelation 14:7 "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters".

If the first and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul (Matt. 22:37), why, then, does this angel's message tell us to "fear God"?

Fear in English is usually associated with terror, dread, horror, fright, panic, alarm, trepidation, apprehension or being afraid, but the word most often used is fear.

In part, I disagree with a recent article Fritz Chery wrote. She claims, "Jesus said many people who claim to be Christian are going to Hell. No one thinks that they are going to Hell until they wake up

in Hell! ... How can you learn about grace without learning the fear of God and the holy wrath of God? There is no mercy in Hell! ...

Evidence that you fear God will be seen by the way that you live your life. I went to school with a kid that had a 'Fear God' tattoo. Now that same kid is doing 10 years in prison because he truly didn't fear God.

Some of the consequences that many people go through like addiction, prison, aids, death, unexpected pregnancies, financial troubles, health problems, etc. is because they don't fear God."

A sermon written by British Colonial Christian theologian Jonathan Edwards was preached to his own congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts, early in 1741.

It had such a profound effect that he preached it again on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut. It was titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God".

It was a "hellfire and damnation" appeal to sinners to recognize that God will judge them harshly

and that this judgment will be more fearful and painful than they can comprehend. According to Edwards, it is this sadistic God's will for them to fail but not yet.

Jonathan Edwards presupposes God to be angry and vengeful. Edwards wanted his listeners to realize that they will fail without God's help and will to prevail. He wants them to understand that they are totally dependent upon and at the mercy of this angry vengeful God.

God is not a terrorist. The sole purpose of terrorism is not to kill or maim, but to instil fear. Listen to these comments made by a US resident in regard to the terrorist attacks of Tuesday September 11, 2001 that killed nearly 3,000 individuals - mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters and brothers.

On Monday, we e-mailed jokes.
On Tuesday, we did not.

On Monday, we were fussing about praying in school.
On Tuesday, we would have been hard pressed to find a school where someone was not praying.

On Monday, our heroes were athletes.
On Tuesday, we relearned who heroes are.

On Monday, there were people trying to separate us by race, gender, colour, and creed.
On Tuesday, we were all holding hands.

On Monday, we were irritated that our tax rebate checks had not arrived.
On Tuesday, we gave money away gladly to people we had never met.

On Monday, we were upset that we had to wait 5 minutes in a fast food line.
On Tuesday, we stood in line for 3 to 5 hours to give blood for the dying.

On Monday, we argued with our kids to clean up their rooms.
On Tuesday, we couldn't get home fast enough to hug our kids.

On Monday, we went to work as usual.
On Tuesday, we went to work, but some of us didn't come home.

On Monday, we had families.
On Tuesday, we had orphans.

On Monday, September 10th, life felt routine.
On Tuesday, September 11th, it did not.

I would like to suggest that it was fear that followed of the 9/11 attacks and it was fear that caused them.

Fear fuels anger and fear-instilled anger was behind the slaying of Abel, the inquisition, the holocaust, and practically every act of terrorism and major conflict in between.

# Afraid of God?

## So, should we be afraid of God?

The Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt, built by and resembling Pharaoh Khafre, was worshipped as the protector god (possibly Horus or Re-Harakhte) and was greatly feared, so much so that the Arabic name for the Sphinx is ‘Abu Elhaul’ which means ‘the Father of Fear’.

The term sphinx is a Greek word that originally referred to a frightening mythical evil monster.

Like the English language, New Testament Greek has a number of synonyms for fear, but has primarily one common word for fear, ‘*phobos*’. So when the New Testament talks of the fear of the Lord it mostly uses the word *phobos*.

Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary says that the Greek noun *phobos* can mean “reverential

fear" of God, "not a mere 'fear' of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him"

Note the context of the first angels' message in Revelation 14:7 This message, is introduced in the preceding verse, verse 6: *"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."*

The word Gospel comes from two old English words: *goo-ood* (later changed to good) and *spel* (meaning news).

Good news is hardly synonymous with fear.

The word Gospel in the Greek is the word *euaggelion* (pronounced yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on) also meaning good news, not terror, dread, horror, fear or being afraid.

*Phobos* is used in verses such as in Acts 9:31

Acts 9:31 says, "*Then had the churches rest*

*throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the *fear* of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."*

Bearing in mind the Lord and the Holy Spirit are both God, this verse uses the words fear and comfort, rest (or peace) and edification (or building up) together, suggesting that the fear of the Lord is not 'being afraid' but reverencing God, peacefully enjoying life and growing.

In the same way two words used together 'clean' and 'fear' in Psalm 19:9 hardly speak of fearfulness. Psalm 19:9 says, *"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether".*

The semantic parallelism form of the Hebrew poetry in this verse also links truth and righteousness with fear.

Just as in Psalms 33:8 & 9 the words fear and awe parallel each other: *"Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he*

*commanded, and it stood fast."*

Nelson's NKJV Study Bible includes this helpful summary as a footnote to the expression, "Blessed is every one that fears the Lord" in Psalm 128:1

It says, "The fear of God is an attitude of respect, a response of reverence and wonder. It is the only appropriate response to our Creator and Redeemer"

Greek does have another couple of words for fear,

For example, 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." The Greek word here is deilia which means "cowardice, timidity, fearfulness". Deilia is consistently used in a negative manner,

Another is *eulabeomai*, (pronounced yoo-lab-eh'-om-ahee) meaning 'reverence', and this is used in verses such as in Hebrews 11:7, *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house;*

*by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith".*

So, according to Hebrews 11:7 it was out of reverence for God that Noah acted.

# Reverential Fear

**Reverence for God helps us to take Him and His beneficial laws seriously.**

Being in harmony with the spiritual laws that govern the universe has astounding benefits. Many of these come in this life, but the greatest benefits will be experienced in the life to come.

Kathryn Albig wrote: To fear God is absolute reverence and awe for an Almighty God, the Creator of all things. In the Bible we get a few glimpses into heaven, and we see the heavenly creatures worship Him around His throne continually, crying out “Holy, holy, holy!” and covering their faces.

This Almighty God has called me by name to serve Him, and He is working in me so that I can be saved to be with Him for eternity. This should cause an inexpressible love and gratitude and reverence to grow and increase in my heart.

The online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, defines it this way (quote) "[The] Fear of God refers to … a specific sense of respect, awe, and submission to a deity."

Consider this fascinating passage: Psalm 130:3-4, *"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? 4) But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."*

God's offer of forgiveness to those who repent gives us a reason to to have sense of respect and a reason to change. It also gives us a reason to be eternally grateful and to choose to grow in love to be more like our loving God.

The reverential fear of the Lord is designed to help us grow to become more like God – that is to grow in love. And this growth removes any need to be terrified of God's judgment.

As the apostle John put it in 1 John 4:17-18: *"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.*

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love".*

In the 15th Century, Johann Gerhard wrote, "The fear of God is to be united with the love of God; for love without fear makes men remiss, and fear without love makes them servile and desperate."

Now here is something that you may not have noticed before. When Satan met Jesus in the wilderness to tempt him, Jesus quoted Old Testament scripture. After the third recorded temptation, Jesus said, *"Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."* (Matthew 4:10)

Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13 where it says, *"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name."* Jesus translated the word 'fear' as 'worship'.

The Hebrew language has at least two different words for fear: *pakh'-ad* meaning sudden alarm, terror or becoming afraid, and *yir-aw'* meaning awe, respect, reverence and admiration.

For example, in Proverbs 16:6 we are told that the fear of God will cause people to depart from evil.

Proverbs 16:6, *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil"*.

'Fear' in this verse is the Hebrew word *'yir-aw'*, meaning reverence. It is **by** fear not **out of** fear that men depart from evil

This same word *'yir-aw'* and its companion *yaw-ray'* are found in Psalm 34:9, *"O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. My personal translation of this is: Revere the Lord for those who reverence Him lack nothing"*.

We need to make some important distinctions regarding the biblical meaning of "fearing" God.

These distinctions can be helpful, but they can also be a little dangerous.

When Martin Luther struggled with that, he made this distinction, which has since become somewhat famous or perhaps infamous: He

distinguished between what he called a servile fear and a filial fear.

The servile fear is a kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for his tormentor, the jailer, or the executioner. It's that kind of dreadful anxiety in which someone is frightened by the clear and present danger that is represented by another person.

Or it's the kind of fear that a slave would have at the hands of a malicious master who would come with the whip and torment the slave. Servile refers to a posture of servitude toward a malevolent owner.

Luther distinguished between that and what he called filial fear, drawing from the Latin concept from which we get the idea of family. It refers to the regard that a child has for his father.

Luther is picturing a child who has tremendous respect and love for his father or mother and who dearly wants to please them. He has a fear or an anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of torture or even of punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is, in that child's world, the source of security and love.

Jack Wellman wrote, “The fear of God is not a fear of being struck down by God when you sin, or of having the dread of hell hanging over your head, although that is a real fear for non-believers, but rather the fear of God is a deep, holy, reverential respect and awe for God, for God’s Word, and for obeying God’s commands. Believers don’t obey God out of fear, but out of love, however, fearing God is living in obedience to God.

# Benefits of Fear

The Bible mentions many benefits of fearing the Lord, including the promise of Proverbs 22:4: *"By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life."*

The theologian Oswald Chambers wrote, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else."

Professor Erik Thoennes of the Biola University/Talbot School of Theology, penned this thought: "When you see God for who He is, you would never think of trying to solve your sin problem yourself. And so the fear of the Lord is one of the great needs in the church today, I believe. [it is] something that we have a tough time with, because we think of fearing an abusive father with an unhealthy fear that even thinks of running away from

him. But a true fear of the Lord realizes you can't run from God, and the only option is to run to him. When you do, you find the embracing arms of a loving Father."

The amazing counterintuitive thing in the Bible is that the more you fear the Lord and see Him as high and lifted up, the more you actually get to experience Him in intimacy because who does He draw near to?

It's the one who fears Him, the one who sees Him as high and lifted up, recognizing Him for who He is, and that's the one He draws near to.

We fear that if we fear God, He'll be so distant we won't be able to relate to Him. But it's just the opposite biblically. He moves toward those who see Him for who He is, and in their humility, He lifts them up.

When Howel Harris, a burning flame of Welsh Methodist Christianity, was converted at the Talgarth Anglican Church in 1738, the experience taught him what it means to fear God and brought him into immediate worship of God.

He said, “I felt suddenly my heart melting within me, like wax before the fire, with love to God my Saviour. . . I could not help calling God my Father. I knew that I was His child and that He loved me and heard me. My soul, being satiated, cried, ‘It is enough, I am satisfied. Give me strength and I will follow Thee through fire and water. I could say that I was happy indeed.’”

A little later in 1745, Harris was preaching in the open air on his parents’ grave outside the Talgarth church (since he was not allowed to speak in the building) and he noticed a young man on horseback listening to his preaching from the other side of the church fence.

William Williams, as he sat on his horse, was converted that day as Harris preached, and soon afterward God placed a new song in Williams’ heart. I love to hear the Welsh people sing that hymn today. It is their national song. When they sing, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” to John Hughes’ tune “CWM Rhondda.” it lifts you out of this world into the throne room of heaven.

A couple of lines in particular speak of how intimately we should fear God: ‘I am weak, but Thou are mighty; hold me with Thy powerful hand’ and ‘…bid my anxious fears subside’.

Here are the lyrics to William William’s hymn, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”:

***1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,***
***pilgrim through this barren land.***
***I am weak, but thou art mighty;***
***hold me with thy powerful hand.***
***Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,***
***feed me till I want no more;***
***feed me till I want no more.***

***2. Open now the crystal fountain,***
***whence the healing stream doth flow;***
***Let the fire and cloudy pillar***
***lead me all my journey through.***
***Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,***
***be thou still my strength and shield;***
***be thou still my strength and shield.***

*3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,*
*bid my anxious fears subside;*
*Death of death and hell's destruction,*
*land me safe on Canaan's side.*
*Songs of praises, songs of praises,*
*I will ever give to thee;*
*I will ever give to thee.*